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ABSTRACT

An effort must be made in the field of phonetics to attract and retain the best students. With this goal in mind, teachers of phonetics must plan their programs with great care. Proper sequencing of the initial presentation in the teaching of transcription is essential. The most important consideration is that the student should be able to grasp the material with ease. It is wise to begin with sounds for which there are spelling clues and to limit the number of vowels introduced initially. The use of monosyllables in citation form under primary stress simplifies the introduction. Furthermore, teachers should give students sufficient practice to assure mastery of each step. Another important consideration is to try to foresee and guard against possible errors. Extreme care should be taken to expand only one step at a time and to give adequate practice. (Author/CFM)

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Training Tomorrow's Phoneticians

Lurline H. Coltharp

Dedication to the phonetic sciences leads to concern with the future of the field. An effort should be made to attract and retain the best students. The underlying theory of this presentation is that success gives pleasure and that pleasure stimulates further interest. A proper sequencing of initial presentation in the teaching of transcription will attract and interest students.

Several limitations have been imposed upon this presentation. Consideration of the native language of the student is primary; however, this has been excluded. All illustrations are taken from one group: advanced University students who are monolingual English speakers of the El Paso, Texas region. The examples refer not only to a single language background but also to one dialect. A further consideration is that it is presumed that the student has gained a rudimentary control of the esoteric vocabulary and of the basic concepts of how sound is produced, including the voiced-voiceless contrast. Thus, the content has been limited to initial training of the student in hearing and transcribing.

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The overriding consideration to be applied is the ease with which the student can grasp the material. First,

four basic principles will be considered as a group. Since the students are literate, it is wise to begin with sounds for which there are spelling clues; second, it is advisable to limit the number of vowels introduced initially. Third, the use of monosyllables in citation form under primary stress simplifies the introduction; and, fourth, it is necessary to give practice to build the self confidence of the student so that he may feel the victory of success.

As an example of these, the use of the stops with the lower high front vowel /ɪ/ and practice on monosyllables such as 'pit,' 'bit,' 'kit,' and 'dig' give a simple introduction. This introduction not only gives the student confidence but also provides practice in using brackets. To this may be added a second vowel to expand the available examples. In the El Paso area the low front aesch /æ/ provides sufficient contrast in sound to /ɪ/ and introduces the student to a symbol not in the orthographic system. At first, however, unfamiliar symbols should be introduced sparingly and most of them should be reserved for later stages.

A further basic principle is that possible errors must be forseen and guarded against. The student must be trained to avoid over-dependence on the spelling system and also to avoid using the rules for capitalization. For these, one suggestion is the use of the final /k/ as represented in ⟨ck⟩ in 'tick' and 'pick' to illustrate that two letters represent only one sound. The proper name

'Dick' can serve to emphasize the use of lower case letters. Further steps away from dependence on spelling clues can be given to the student in a progression such as 'tick,' 'tack,' and the plural 'tacks' ⟨tacks⟩. The homophone 'tax' ⟨tax⟩ may be used to teach that not only may two letters ⟨ck⟩ represent one sound /k/ but also one letter ⟨x⟩ may represent two sounds /ks/.

Extreme care should be taken to expand only one step at a time and to practice for mastery of each new step.

There must be special training in three areas: first, sounds for which there are no spelling clues; second, sounds for which there are conflicting spelling clues; and, third, sounds for which there is limited or mixed usage. In distinguishing the voiceless and voiced interdentals /θ/, /ð/ both of which are spelled ⟨th⟩, students often appreciate lists to be memorized: 'thick' and 'bath or 'this' and 'that.' Sounds with conflicting spelling clues such as the voiceless fricative /ʃ/ and the affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ require special drill. Progressions such as 'ship,' 'chip,' 'gyp' assist the student in recognition. Limited or mixed usage in an area can be exemplified by the voiced fricative /ʒ/. Some speakers in the El Paso area end 'garage' with /ʒ/ and others use /dʒ/. One further example of mixed usage is in /w/ and /hw/. Older speakers use /hwɪtʃ/ /wɪtʃ/, but these are homophonous for younger speakers in the area; not only must dialect be considered but also age differentials.

A number of basic principles have been introduced. Begin with sounds for which there are spelling clues, limit the number of vowels introduced initially, and use only monosyllables in citation form under primary stress. Further, give the student sufficient practice to insure his mastery of each step. Introduce unfamiliar symbols sparingly or reserve them for later stages, recognize possible errors in student transcription and guard against them, and train the student not to depend on spelling clues. Expand only one step at a time and remember to give adequate practice, and, finally, provide special training in three areas: sounds for which there are no spelling clues; sounds for which there are conflicting spelling clues; and sounds for which there is limited or mixed usage.

The consonants have not been covered completely nor have the special problems connected with vowel recognition been introduced; however, it is hoped that the principles presented here may prove useful not only in the areas for which examples have been provided but in other areas as well.

If the student is trained in the proper way, he will have the glow of success and be attracted to the phonetic sciences. Subsequently, he can appreciate the fascinating effects of assimilation and stress variation and the thousand and one fine variations in sound distinguished by the accomplished phonetician.